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QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Rapporteur: Mr. El Walid DOUDECH (Tunisia)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 20 September 1996, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-first session the item entitled "Questions relating to information" and to allocate it to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

2. The Fourth Committee considered the item at its 9th to 11th meetings, on 6 and 7 November 1996 (see A/C.4/51/SR.9-11).

3. The Fourth Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Information; 1/

(b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/406).

4. At the 9th meeting, on 6 November, the representative of Algeria, the Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee and the draft proposals contained therein. 2/

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/51/21).

2/ Ibid., para. 47.

5. At the same meeting, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information made an introductory statement on the activities of the Department of Public Information.

6. At the 11th meeting, on 7 November, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information made a concluding statement.

II. CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS A AND B CONTAINED IN PARAGRAPH 47 OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION 1/

7. At its 11th meeting, on 7 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, draft resolutions A and B contained in paragraph 47 of the report of the Committee on Information 1/ (see para. 8).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)

8. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

DRAFT RESOLUTION A

Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information, 3/

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, 4/

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through

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3/ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

4/ A/51/406.

endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim, in addition to bilateral cooperation, at providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication 5/ of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

DRAFT RESOLUTION B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its primary role in elaborating, coordinating and harmonizing United Nations policies and activities in the field of information,

Also reaffirming that the Secretary-General should ensure that the activities of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, as the focal point for the public information tasks of the United Nations, are strengthened and improved, keeping in view the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the priority areas defined by the General Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information,

Taking note of all the reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the Committee at its eighteenth session,

Encouraging the Secretary-General to develop a concrete plan to continue to enhance the public image of the United Nations,

1. Welcomes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to membership in the Committee on Information;

2. Recalls its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

3. Calls upon the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993;

4. Takes note of the reductions of the resources allocated to the Department of Public Information, expresses its concern about the proposals of the Secretary-General on further reductions of the Department's budget which might negatively affect the activities mandated by the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to support the Department of Public Information,

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5/ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980, vol. I, Resolutions, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

in accordance with section II, paragraph 6, of Assembly resolution 50/214 of 23 December 1995;

5. Also takes note of the efforts of the Secretary-General to put into practice the need for an effective public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department at the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with the other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

6. Requests the management of the Department of Public Information to review the Department's publications and proposals for publications to ensure that all publications fulfil an identifiable need, that they do not duplicate other publications inside or outside the United Nations system and that they are produced in a cost-effective manner, and to report thereon to the Committee at its nineteenth session;

7. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the review of major publications of the Department of Public Information, 6/ and urges all efforts to ensure timely production and dissemination of its major publications, in particular the UN Chronicle, the Yearbook of the United Nations, the World Media Handbook and Africa Recovery, maintaining consistent editorial independence and accuracy, taking the necessary measures to ensure that they contain adequate, objective and equitable information about issues before the Organization and reflecting divergent opinions wherever they occur;

8. Requests the Secretary-General to conduct a review of existing publications produced and disseminated by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development and to renew his efforts to improve existing publications or explore the possibility of alternative publications, in a manner in which such publications respond to the development-related information needs of people, in accordance with the requirements that the publications fulfil an identifiable need, that they do not duplicate other publications inside or outside the United Nations system and that they are produced in a cost-effective manner;

9. Reaffirms the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, particularly in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is a need for greater understanding about United Nations activities;

6/ A/AC.198/1996/3.

10. Reaffirms also that United Nations information centres meet the primary objectives outlined by the Committee in its report to the General Assembly at its forty-second session; 7/

11. Recalls the report of the Secretary-General on the results of the trial of integrating United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations system in general, 8/ and requests the Secretary-General to continue the integration exercise in a cost-effective manner and whenever feasible, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and ensuring that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres are not adversely affected and to report thereon to the Committee;

12. Welcomes the action by some Member States with regard to financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis;

13. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1995, 9/ and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means to rationalize and effect equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres;

14. Also takes note of the important impact on the functioning and the fulfilment of the objectives of some of the United Nations information centres of the development of new technologies such as the Internet and CD-ROM, and their effect on the dissemination of information, the increase in the number of United Nations depository libraries in some Member States and the increased importance of all concerned actors of the international community in their cooperation with the Organization;

15. Requests the Secretary-General therefore to submit a report to the Committee, for its consideration at its nineteenth session, on United Nations information centres, in particular, on added value, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and avoidance of duplication, especially in the areas of new technologies, with a view to offering recommendations on the review, strengthening and rationalization of their activities;

16. Reaffirms the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may judge necessary regarding the establishment and location of these centres;

7/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21), chap. III, sect. D, recommendation 36.

8/ A/AC.198/1995/5.

9/ A/AC.198/1996/2.

17. Recognizes the continued enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials;

18. Takes note of the requests of Bulgaria, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan and Slovakia for information centres or information components;

19. Requests the Secretary-General to conduct an evaluation, within existing resources and without detriment to mandated programmes and activities, through the services of an independent consultant selected after an open and transparent selection process, of the functioning of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, covering, inter alia, its infrastructure, operations, staffing and budgetary situation, with a view to improving all its services and taking advantage of new, cost-effective automated and electronic library information and communication technologies and services and taking into account previous studies on the subject, and to submit a report thereon to the Committee at its nineteenth session;

20. Expresses its full support for the wide and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through a continuation of United Nations press releases in both working languages of the Secretariat, namely, English and French, and stresses the importance of the continued speedy issue and high quality of those press releases in both working languages;

21. Encourages the Secretary-General to explore ways and means to improve the access of United Nations radio to airwaves worldwide, bearing in mind that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and is an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with its resolution 48/44 B;

22. Underlines the continued importance for the Department of Public Information of using traditional and mass media channels in disseminating information on the United Nations, and encourages the Department to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, such as the Internet and CD-ROM, in order to improve in a cost-effective, comprehensive and timely manner the dissemination of information on the United Nations, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

23. Commends the Department of Public Information for the important role it played in responding to the increased public interest resulting from the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations;

24. Requests the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access to United Nations guided tours, as well as to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up to date and relevant as possible;

25. Invites Member States and relevant international organizations to submit to the Secretary-General by 15 March 1997 their observations and suggestions on ways and means of furthering the development of communication

infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a report thereon to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session;

26. Recommends, in order to continue to facilitate contact between the Department of Public Information and the Committee on Information between sessions, that the Bureau of the Committee, together with representatives of each regional group, the Group of 77 and China, in close contact with the members of the Committee, should continue to meet on a regular basis and consult at periodic intervals with representatives of the Department;

27. Takes note of the contribution made by Member States, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information and the Special United Nations Coordinator for International Cooperation on Chernobyl, to information activities for the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, and recalls its resolutions concerning the consequences of the above-mentioned disaster, in particular, resolutions 50/31 B of 6 December 1995 and 50/134 of 20 December 1995, encouraging the regular exchange of information with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, with a view to enhancing world public awareness of the consequences of such disasters;

28. Recognizes the positive role of the regional seminars held at Windhoek, Santiago, Almaty and Sana'a for the promotion of independent and pluralistic media, takes note of the invitation of the twenty-eighth General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in its resolution 4/6 of 15 November 1995, to cooperate with the Director-General of the Organization in the preparation and organization of a similar regional seminar in 1997 in Central and Eastern Europe, depending on the availability of funding, also takes note of the offer of the Government of Bulgaria to host such a seminar, and invites the Department of Public Information to provide the requested assistance in jointly mobilizing the support of various other voluntary funding sources;

29. Requests that the Department of Public Information be provided with an identification of all costs, including estimated man-hours and printing, publishing and material expenditures, arising from mandates contained in resolutions other than the annual resolution of the General Assembly as recommended by the Committee on Information;

30. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session and to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

31. Decides that the nineteenth session of the Committee should last not more than ten working days, and requests the Bureau of the Committee to explore ways and means of making optimum use of the Committee's time;

32. Requests the Committee to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session;

33. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".